

Movie Makers

March-April 2005

Volume 15 No. 2

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

DIRECTING ACTORS

Stuart Rumens

(Stuart is a UK based member of AMPS, he has written extensively on film making and has judged a number of UK non-commercial Festivals.)

Ned Cordery was with me in England last year when he asked me to write a piece about directing actors. My mind instantly flooded with a hundred hints, tips and wrinkles. Later, I cast my mind back a couple of weeks to an occasion when I had been doing just that—directing actors—and I reflected that I had not employed a single one of my prescribed tips. Why?—

because I had been too busy watching my actors remembering their lines. I had been so concerned that they might stop remembering them that I dared not interfere with their work-process.

I've been in this situation too many times: I hire a bunch of guys, give them ten pages of corporate gobbledygook to memorize; then agonize while watching them struggle. These were, all three, seasoned professional actors, experienced on stage, film and TV, yet they struggled, and their performances suffered. They struggled because searching for lines is incompatible with (at least, damaging to) creative performance.

ACTORS ARE CATTLE?

Actors' brains are different from ours, but they're no bigger. Like the rest of us they can't do two things at the same time—not properly. They can't deliver speech, and vocalize it with engaging expression, while simultaneously scouring their memory cells for the words. Acting and remembering are mutually exclusive. Conscious, deliberate remembering gets in the way of acting, and acting impedes the conscious process of recall. The last thing you then need is a director telling you what to do. If actors are to succeed in their fragile task, the recall process must be uncon-

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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No. 2**

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George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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2005 Convention!

We have been invited to join AMMA, the Amateur Movie Makers Ass'n, on a cruise to Alaska next year. This cruise would take the place of the usual combined festival of AMPS, AMMA and the Ten Best of the West that is usually held in either September or October.

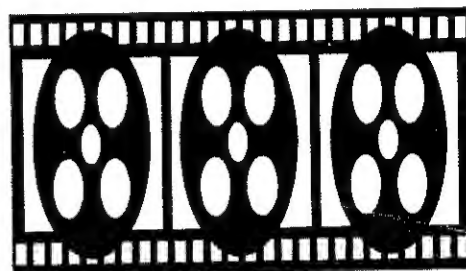
The cruise will depart from Vancouver B.C. on Sept. 10th and end eight days later, stopping at the ports of Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan and visiting the Hubbard Glacier. All of this will be done in the comfort of the Royal Caribbean's "Radiance of the Sea" cruise ship. The cost varies from \$800US for an inside room to \$900US for an outside room. These rates are very good, due to the advance booking of the rooms.

The 2nd and 7th day of travel will offer those who attend an opportunity to view the winning video entries for the aforementioned contests.

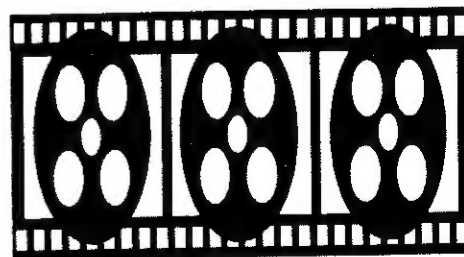
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halmar@niagra.com
(<mailto:halmar@niagra.com>)

Planning for the 2006 Convention

We are planning the 2006 Festivals, combined AMPS, AMMA and Ten Best of the West, and propose Las Vegas as the location, how do you feel about this as a venue for us? Comments please to ned@ampsvideo.com

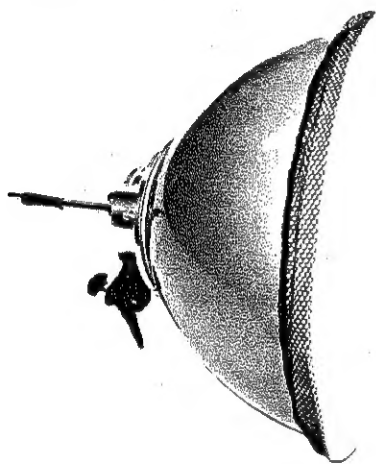


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Lighting

The following information was provided by Fred Ginsburg of Equipment Emporium Inc. For those interested in these lights, Fred can be reached at (818) 838-4457 or at ege@earthlink.net. Equipment Emporium is located at 15235 Brand Blvd, Ste A-110, Mission Hills CA 91345 and can be found on the Internet at www.equipmentemporium.com



RS-4015 Fluoro Lite Head, only \$89.95

Literally putting a new twist on the concept of the photo reflector shell lighting fixture, the Fluoro Lite features three ceramic socket heads in one 16 inch aluminum lamphead. Designed to accept three RS-3995 screw-in 26watt spiral fluorescent bulbs, this unit produces the equivalent of 375 watts of 5000 K daylight balanced illumination.

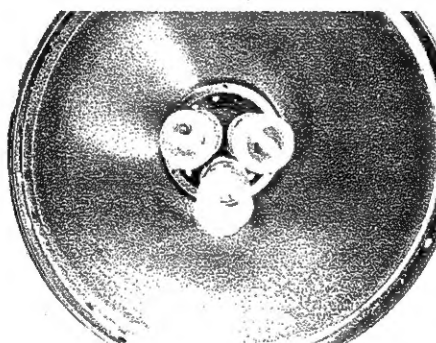
Just imagine, almost 400 watts of light from a unit that

draws under 80 watts of power!

Balanced for 5000 K, this lamphead is ideal for matching overhead fluorescent lighting and stray daylight from windows. (Replace practical lamps in your set background with RS-3995 screw-in bulbs to balance out the color temperature.)

Spiral fluorescent bulbs output almost no heat. Comfortable for talent; less of a fire hazard than conventional hot lighting.

Positive tilt & lock bracket mounts on 3/8 and 5/8 stands. Twelve foot 3-prong AC cord with in-line switch.



Elastic front diffusion cover included. Bulbs NOT included.

RS-3995 fluorescent spiral bulb \$15.95

RS-4016 Complete One Lite Kit, only \$189.95

Complete Fluoro Lite Kit includes one RS-4015 Lite Head, three RS-3995 bulbs, diffuser, and an 80-inch 3-section stand.

RS-4017 Two-light Complete Kit, only \$369.95

MK800 Metal Halide Lite, only \$299.95

Uses a 150watt metal halide



bulb (included) that puts out the equivalent of 800 watts of 5200K daylight balanced light!

Heavy duty, fan-less lamphead is perfect for large interiors or exterior fill. Mounts onto standard 3/8 and 5/8 stands.

Draws only 150 watts of AC, so you won't have to worry about blown circuit breakers. Puts out very little heat, about the same as a traditional 100 watt lightbulb.

Built-in ballast is air cooled and totally quiet. Takes about 5 minutes for the light to fully brighten and stabilize. Allow 10 minutes for electronic "cooling" between re-strikes. A red/green LED indicates status.

Includes RS-3994 metal halide bulb, safety wire mesh screen.

Four Wall- ing your production

Looking for places to show your latest production? Lots of festival rejections? Consider four walling your production. Four walling is generally done to recoup production costs. However, when trying for a financial return is a primary focus then four walling can be difficult. So if making money is not your goal, then four walling could be for you.

Four walling means you find the place to show your production, do all the marketing and public relations, sell tickets (if that is your goal) set up the equipment, run the show and answer questions. Let's look at a specific example.

I finished my documentary regarding Liberty Ships and wanted to show it in my local community where there is a large number of military retirees who possibly might be interested in viewing it.

Location:

Depending on your topic, a local museum, art gallery, library or even a community theatre might be interested in holding a screening of your work for free. Try movie theaters, but generally movie

theaters want to make money and will want to charge a lot of money to rent one of their theaters. I established a relationship with a local art gallery that has a room to screen movies and documentaries in. Often this entity can even help with getting the word out on the showing. Agree on a date that is far enough away for you to properly promote the event.

Marketing:

After you have nailed down the location and date its time to promote the evening. Make a poster consisting of stills from your production. Keep the design simple but with a lot of color and large letters. Has anyone notable seen your work and commented on it? Include the comments in your poster. Look around for places to place them. Again, the local library was a good place to hang a poster. I was able to hang posters in a local grocery store, veteran's home and certain businesses. Don't be surprised if certain chains stores refuse to hang them, that's ok. Generally the owners of locally owned businesses don't mind hanging the poster. I also made a 4-foot high poster that hung in the window of the gallery. Put your poster on a post card and mail it out to people who you want to attend. Be sure to coordinate this effort with the location as the people there maybe sending out announcements as well.

Are there local radio stations in your community? Send the morning person and or news director an electronic press kit. An electronic press kit is generally a CD with a synopsis, cast/crew credits, stills and director's bio. Local morning shows are always looking for interesting people to interview. Our showing is unique. I was able to appear on three local radio stations prior to my screening. Send the electronic press kit to the local paper as well. Maybe they will put a still or two in an article. I managed to get articles placed into two local newspapers. The key to getting media attention is to be polite to the media people, return phone calls promptly and don't promise anything you can't do. Maybe you get on a local TV show as well. If so provide the station with a trailer of the production. A trailer is a long commercial promoting the production.

Don't forget to promote your evening by word of mouth. Seek out people that might be interested in your topic. Word of mouth is an excellent way to get the message out.

The night of the screening, I arrived 2 hours early in order to set up the large screen projector and sound system. It's important to have a good sound system so all can hear in the room. Have giveaways, maybe an extra poster autographed by you or extra copies of your produc-

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Why Didn't They Win?

Editor's note; This is the last in a series of articles that originally appeared in Movie-makers regarding judging.

November 1995

We asked judges to comment on films that did not win.

I shall analyze three videos that were definitely below the winning level, a documentary, a dramatic piece and a fantasy entry.

The documentary was quite unusual, a series of a dozen or more fires, buildings burning, house, a turned over truck and some kind of van.

The color was vivid and well exposed. But soon a sameness was apparent, the scenes seemed all alike. Though the camera was handheld, framing and centering were good, but where was the picture going? We were not told anything about the fires nor why this subject had been photographed. There was no theme, no reason given. Scenes are not enough, there has to be a thread of continuity which was lacking here.

In the drama picture we see a

young chap walking down a country path. Suddenly a slightly older individual laps out of the bushes, grabs the teenager and hauls him off into the woods.

Next we observe a man in the sheriff's office talking to the sheriff. It seems a bad hombre is loose in the area and he should be rounded up and incarcerated. The dialog was not specific, but that appeared to be the motivation for the ensuing action.

Two men are seen strapping gun holsters to their belts and start off, apparently to catch the bad man. It was not made clear why he was bad nor why he was wanted.

There was no establishment of the characters. It was up to the viewer to tell the good guys from the bad. After considerable chasing which constantly broke the rule of screen direction, two men haul a third man into the sheriff's office. No close-ups, seldom any change of angle, hand held camera, this was all a mis-match that had not been carefully pre-planned.

The fantasy picture started out with some double exposure, dancers on a stage with the camera always held at an angle, the images moving to the left in one exposure, to the right in the second exposure. The camera moved constantly causing the image at times to appear to dissolve

into each other. In about 4 minutes a third exposure was introduced, moving straight down against the slanted images. Interesting at first, but the video was 25 minutes long and after 6 minutes nothing changed, the pattern continued moving slowly on the screen. Had the maker stopped there the judges might have kept awake. He simply did not know when to stop.

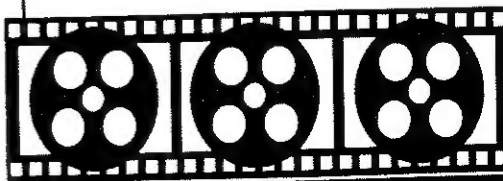
Fantasy or abstract? What is their purpose, and how does one judge them?

(Continued from page 4)

tions. If it is a fictional work, maybe you have some props you use as door prizes.

Do you have an older work to use as kind of a warmup to your production? Consider showing it.

Of course stick around for the applause and Q and A session afterward. I did all of these things and I figure I had over 120 people at the screening. A phenomenal success.



(Continued from page 1)

scious, and this means that lines must be familiar to the point of second-nature.

When actors are thoroughly familiar with their lines, they don't remember them—the lines simply flow out as if they had just thought of them. And while that's happening, they'll be doing sexy things with their eyes, their hands, and their intonation—all as if these, too, had just been invented. When this magical synergy occurs, only then, is there an opportunity for the director to develop their performances. Development is an enjoyable process for talented actors, but not if they are struggling with a recall-workload.

WORD REHEARSAL

So how can you be sure that your actors have done their homework?—stored their lines for unconscious, spontaneous retrieval? You can't be sure until you try—that's what word rehearsals are for. If you find that they can't remember their lines, perhaps they're lazy. Rule out laziness, and there is only one other inescapable explanation—you've got a lousy script.

The truth is that good lines are easy to remember, and bad lines are difficult. If competent actors keep crashing (not necessarily on the same word or phrase) this inevitably means that the language is defective. Ideas expressed in

natural, logical sequence are easily stored, and easily retrieved. Conversely, poor language is akin to a quadrilateral equation. It's hard to store, and its retrieval is a punishing workload which drains horsepower from the creative effort.

How can you know? The first symptom of a bad script is the actors' failure to pick up their cues. It's one thing to get lost in the middle of a monologue, but if actors miss their cues, this is a clear warning that the script sucks. In real-life conversation we pick up, and develop, each other's thought-streams with amazing ease. Even when somebody says, "*Changing the subject...*" you will find that the speaker's new subject has its roots (its cue) in something that was said earlier. It should be—it has to be—the same in prepared dialogue. One character's line must pick up naturally, logically, from another's. If they keep crashing on their cues the script is probably defective throughout. For if the writer has failed to weave natural thought-progression at the pivotal point of speech-exchange, s/he cannot be trusted to have constructed any natural progression in the body of the speeches themselves.

THE CUE TEST

Grant the writer (before finding another) the courtesy of a simple test. Get a colleague (or the mailman) to read the dialogue aloud to you. Set

yourself the task of picking up every cue, and delivering the first few words of each new line. If it's well written dialogue, you will remember, and be able at least to paraphrase, the opening of each new speech. If it's real good dialogue, swap places with the mailman, and be astonished; he, too, will be able to pick up the cues. Because, in the world of mailmen (the real world) when Tom says, "*I thought we might go for a couple of beers tonight.*", and Susan replies, "*Sorry, I'm washing my hair.*", the new line is unforgettable. Why?—because there is a logical connection—not because the reply is the only possible response. Susan could respond, "*The last time we went for a couple of beers, I had to carry you home.*" Or, "*The last time you took me out I had to pick up the tab.*" Or, "*Why don't we take in a movie instead?*"

The mailman will remember any one of these replies, because they all have connection to the cue. If, on the other hand, Susan replies, "*Did you know Samantha is pregnant?*", the mailman (and Susan) will have to store and retrieve a new idea, unconnected to the cue. If there is no dramatic reason for unconnected progression—no reason why Susan should deliberately ignore Tom's invitation, or for her being so preoccupied that she failed to hear it—fire the writer.

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The Bare Bones Independent Film Festival

The screening venue was the restored historic Roxy Theater, located in downtown Muskogee, Oklahoma. Massive mailings and e-mails of press releases to media and potential audience members in hopes of packing the house were completed. The setting was perfect for my last documentary, "Pray's Passion." The event? The Bare Bones Independent Film Festival or BBIFF.

Hosted by Shireen Butterfly and Oscar Ray, filmmakers themselves, BBIFF is known as a filmmakers festival. While the festival started the evening before, for me, the event started with a filmmakers' brunch on the day of my documentary screening. The brunch was an enlightening experience. It was a chance to mingle with filmmakers all over the country. I came away from that experience realizing that the attending true independent producers were in the same "boat" that I am. We all are looking for financing and distribution for our "epics."

The screening of my documentary was fairly well attended. The screening was followed by a Q and A session. Glenn Pray and most of his family were in attendance.

A highlight of the BBIFF was meeting fellow AMPS member Greg Raw who is from Tulsa. He was instrumental in drumming up interest in my documentary screening. We had e-mail frequently but I had never met him in person. I was watching a music video playing on the big screen at the Roxy and remarked aloud, "I've seen this before!" The person standing next to me was surprised and asked where. It was Greg's video he had sent me a copy of previously. We laughed and hit it off nicely.

The biggest surprise came during the awards ceremony. MY documentary was recognized as the best documentary at the BBIFF. The winner's plaques consist of a nicely finished piece of cedar topped with a ceramic long horn skull.

If you are searching for a fun festival where your work will be appreciated and you will be welcomed, enter the Bare Bones Independent Film Festival.

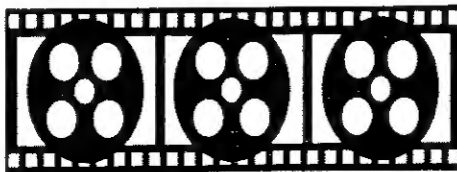
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I have sometimes said (more than half-seriously) that a good script makes the director redundant. "Give them good lines, and they'll do the job for you." The wholly serious point is that a good script allows the director to work, since the actors, then freed from arduous recall, are equipped to receive direction.

This piece on directing has strayed into script-writing. But another ten thousand words on the subject would be justified, since good dialogue is what equips actors to do their magical thing with voice and gesture, and to create all those intangible behavior mechanisms that convincingly portray a living human being. Only unconscious word-recall can make the magic work.

Directing actors? First be sure that the writer has equipped them to act. Only then dare you presume to intervene in their fragile liaison with the Muse.

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I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 10.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 12.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$13.00

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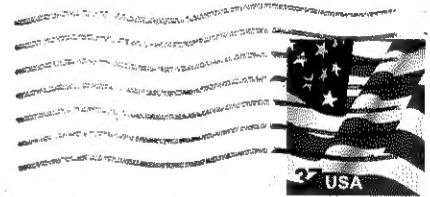
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